

Finns Mull Property Sale Restrictions

By [Rachel Nielsen](#)

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The draft bill, being promoted by a minority bloc, would deny real estate sales in Finland to Russian citizens. **Igor Tabakov**

As a political bloc in Finland pushes for a federal bill to limit the purchase of real estate to Finns and other European Union citizens, Russians wanting to buy property in their northern neighbor are facing a cold gust of Nordic air.

Though both precedent and political sentiment in Finland give the bill little chance of becoming law, the proposal suggests mixed feelings about Russians, who in 2010 bought more than 400 properties in Finland for a total of 56 million euros (\$75 million).

The bill, spearheaded by the Center Party, a bloc that makes up about 18 percent of Finland's parliament, makes the case for EU-only real estate ownership by citing national security and heritage. It was drafted in November and introduced to parliament this month.

There is little doubt that it's targeted at Russians, as Norway, Switzerland and Iceland, which aren't EU nations, are exempted, while Russia, other CIS countries and the countries of the

former Yugoslavia would be affected.

Pertti Salolainen, vice chairman of the Finnish parliament's foreign affairs committee and a member of the National Coalition Party, told The Moscow Times that his party isn't backing the proposed legislation. The country's new president, to be sworn in March 1, is a National Coalition member.

"We think that it's a good thing that there are more Russians buying in Finland," he said in a telephone interview Friday.

News articles in Helsingin Sanomat, a Finnish publication owned by the same company as The Moscow Times, have commented on Russians who "bring revenue to eastern Finland but also arouse suspicions," as one headline read. According to Salolainen, Russian purchases of homes have raised speculation about money laundering, while at the same time improved the economics of Finland's east, which had experienced an exodus of Finns.

According to 2010 figures from Finland's National Land Survey, Russians bought 413 properties in Finland that year, with more than 300 of those purchases concentrated in two regions. There were about 400 properties picked up by Russians in 2009 and 780 properties in 2008, the Land Survey's Mervi Laitinen said by e-mail.

Though Salolainen's National Coalition Party doesn't like the anti-foreigner sentiment in the bill, it does have its own concerns with Russian-Finnish real estate: It wants the Russian government to give Finland "reciprocity" by allowing Finns to buy property close to home.

Since January 2011, when President Dmitry Medvedev banned foreigners from acquiring land in the republic of Karelia and other northwest border areas, Finns have been prohibited from owning property in some of the territories nearest to them.

"We don't think that [such] large border zones are necessary," Salolainen said, referring to the buffer that Russia has effectively established between it and Finland.

Finland's dominant party also wants Russia to make its land registry more transparent, so that it will be easier to determine if Finns can acquire a given property, Salolainen said.

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